

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER 1999

ONE DOLLAR





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

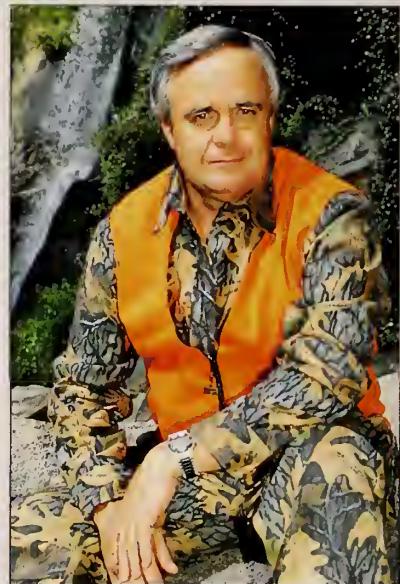
Better Safe Than Sorry

Continuing this month with our message about safety in connection with boating, hunting, and fishing, we want to offer some information that we hope will enhance your time in the fields, forests, and wetlands of the Commonwealth this fall. Our recent weather, with some unseasonal nighttime temperatures in the 50s, has given us an early taste of autumn and now we're really looking forward to spending time in the outdoors doing everything from observing the changing leaf colors to an early morning deer hunt. Since this is the hunting time of year, our continuing emphasis is on safety first.

Each year our Hunter Education program prepares a hunting incident report and the 1998-99 hunting seasons ended with 47 firearms related incidents, with eight fatalities. We would be the first to say that even one fatality is one too many. Through our Hunter Education program and its safety course offerings, about 20,000 students each year learn not only that hunting continues to be a safe outdoor activity, but also what practices will keep it safe. Further information on the mandatory hunter education requirements is available in our hunting and trapping regulation

booklet and class schedules are posted on our web page at [www.dgf.state.va.us](http://www.dgif.state.va.us). Also according to the report, a typical hunting incident in Virginia, since 1987, has the following characteristics: occurred on Saturday, on private land, with a shotgun, with a shooter over 30 years of age having more than 10 years of experience, while hunting deer, with good visibility, in dense cover, in clear weather, with less than 50 yards between the shooter and the victim. The two prominent causes of hunting incidents are 1) the victim was out of sight of the shooter and 2) the shooter failed to identify the target and beyond.

From this information, we can quickly understand how important it is that hunters must know they have legal game in their sights. They must also ensure that a missed shot will not create any danger to others. Being committed to this level of hunter safety is the responsibility of all of us while afield. Coupled with this commitment to safety are the requirements for blaze orange. One of the most important sections in our hunting regulations booklet is on page 33 regarding blaze orange. We have had the blaze orange requirement in the Code of Virginia since 1987, and



Lee Walker

compliance by the hunting community is vital to safety during the general firearms season. While there are a few exceptions to the blaze orange rule, being visible and being seen are perhaps the most important guidelines of hunter safety.

As with all of the seasons offered by our wonderful Commonwealth, fall is a great time of the year to be outdoors. We hope you will have many opportunities to take advantage of this and that all of your experiences will be safe and rewarding. Enjoy the season with your family and friends.

Call 1-800-237-5712
to report wildlife violations.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

Commonwealth of Virginia
James S. Gilmore III, Governor

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If you are into wildlife, plants, ecology, conservation, and history then check out "Soaring High at Caledon Natural Area," page 8.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) ©Joe McDonald
Back Cover: photos by Dwight Dike

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources



Clarence Gregory, S.A.A.
1979

A chance encounter with a trophy buck leaves a lifetime of memories.

story by Tom Barnett
painting by Claiborne Gregory

Quietly, I tiptoed the remaining yards to the hickory tree, easing straight into the barely detectable wind drift. In just over 30 minutes legal shooting time would expire. My foot gently pushed leaves away from the tree's base exposing the humus aroma. I squatted on my heels with my back against an old hickory tree. Camouflage head net and gloves were donned. Apparently, I succeeded in setting up without spooking anything. As the sun dipped further, the temperature dropped like a rock.

A faint rustling soon became audible from the adjacent cutover. More than one deer was approaching the mature hardwoods. Slowly, legs became visible through the lower branches unable to receive sunlight, supporting foliage. First, one doe, then a larger one cautiously advanced. The occasional sound of another deer could be heard behind. Cupping the upper lip over the bottom, breath was exhaled downwards preventing the vapor's visible exit through the head net. The does, a mere 25 yards away, had looked past me, and had not distinguished my presence. More legs appeared. I eased the safety off the little Ruger .44 carbine, and gazed down the bar-

rel at the exiting yearling buck. Wanting the buck to grow to a more challenging age, I watched in lieu of harvesting.

First the does, then the buck crossed the old logging road and cautiously made their way into the big hardwoods. The safety was returned. I checked my watch, and noted that only 17 minutes of legal shooting time remained. The heavily overcast sky was bringing an early nightfall. My back and legs were cramping, and my fingers were cold. After not hearing any additional movement, the tentative decision was made to quit. Slowly, I extracted myself from the unnatural position against the hickory.



I had to hear it twice. There is no other sound like it. Another two toe was tiptoeing inside the cutover. I realized the does and little buck had been allowed to run the gauntlet ahead of something probably much larger! I resumed the previous position against the hickory. One dry leaf at a time was slowly crunched. The sound of branches softly rubbing against antlers was very near. This deer was exiting on a closer trail!

Claiborne Gregory is a landscape, portrait, and wildlife artist. His work is broadly represented in American collections, and included in English, Scottish, and Italian collections as well. Gregory was commissioned to paint the official portrait of Governor George Allen of Virginia and the painting is on permanent display in the State Capitol Building.

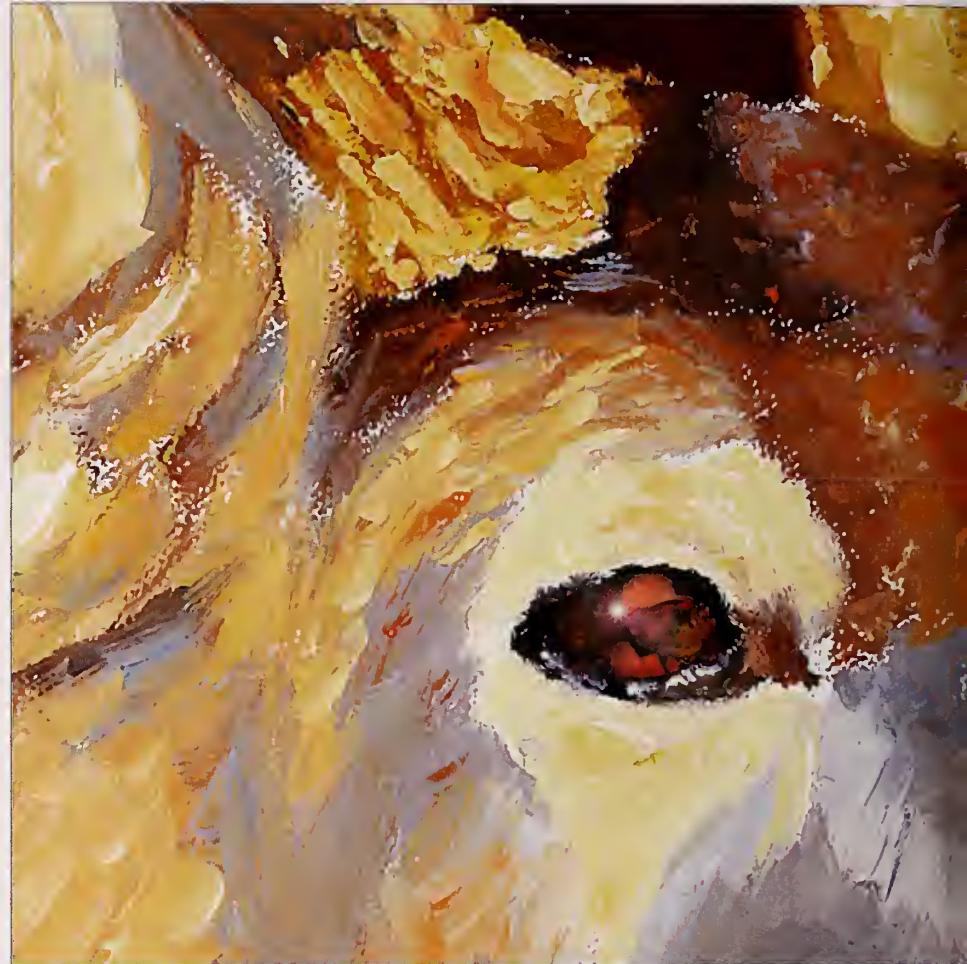
Eye to Eye

Adrenaline raised my pulse rate. This deer was more cautious than the others. At first, only legs could be seen in the cutover. Slowly, as if an apparition from a fog, the heavily antlered buck eased out into the edge of the big woods. The safety was silently slipped off, the cross hairs were centered, and slack was removed from the trigger. He tested the air for offensive odors. His large radar ears sought for unnatural sounds. As there was no urgency to kill, I began absorbing his magnificent stature.

He inched into the big woods one step at a time searching for hints of danger. At a mere 40 feet, the scope was unnecessary. I peered down the gun barrel at the animal's splendor. Seldom is there the opportunity to leisurely absorb the imposing beauty of a majestic creature at this proximity!

As he came closer, my heart was racing with constant doses of adrenaline called, "Buck Fever." He was beautiful, with his polished white tines, and wide beam of thick antlers! As I had harvested similar bucks, there was more thirst to experience than to remove his life form. Turning his head, I estimated his eight point spread at nearly 20 inches with foot long tines towering above his head. His swollen neck and large muscular frame were of incredulous beauty. As he stepped closer, the risk of detection increased. There was something indescribable about the situation: intuition, apathy, or even ignorance; I did not want this experience to terminate!

His massive head turned, and he glared straight at me. It was "Truth or Consequences" time! Are you going to high-tail it back to the cutover, bolt for the deep woods, or do you really know what I am? He stamped one foreleg, then the other. His large white tail rose upwards, and the hairs spread out like a fan. He licked his nose repeatedly. I became mesmerized. His ears were pinned back denoting aggressive body language. The nose licking continued while vast quantities of air were vacuumed for scent parti-



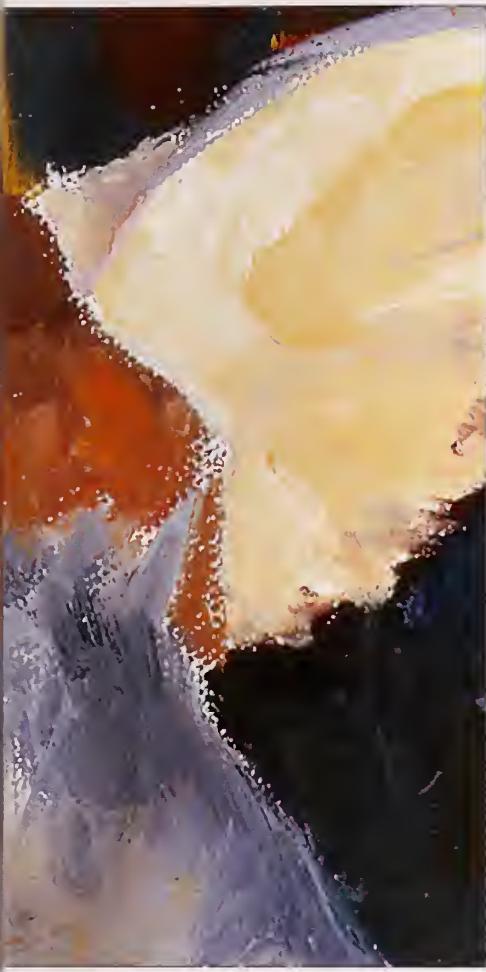
cles. Vapor trails were exhaled into the chilled air. "Your move, Mr. Bucky." He lowered his head with antler points towards me. He hunched his bristled hair shoulders, and charged. What had been a game evolved into a potentially dangerous confrontation. Taking up more slack on the trigger, the little .44 Magnum semi-autoloader carbine was readied for possible self-defense.

He pulled up short, and kicked dirt and leaves into the air. Throwing his head up, he vented a huge vapor cloud. My heart was pounding loudly. I could feel the hammering in my ears. Trying to control my breathing was extremely difficult. The nose licking and deep breathing continued. He desperately tried to get my scent. Apparently, he still did not know what I was! Being downwind, and having come to the hickory into the drift, he was unable to scent my crouched form.

Just yards away, he steamed over the situation. My unnaturalness, his inability to scent me, and his inability to intimidate me into moving frustrated him. We were dangerously close. Why can't you hear the adrenaline induced heart pounding?

He lowered his impressive head, glared at me, and fanned his tail hairs like a peacock again. Dark piercing eyes bored a hole through me. More foot stomping, then two shrill blows. Are you the dominant buck? Did all that vapor come from your mouth, or your flared nostrils? Even at this close proximity, in the failing light, I was not sure. Then it hit me: the stench from his urine soaked hock glands! This bruiser was in full rut.

He bobbed his head and pawed the ground. The ears were pinned further back. He hunched his bristled hair shoulders. The tension level skyrocketed. At this reduced



**With his head held high,
he stared through me.**

**He stamped his
right foreleg twice,
swung his huge body
to the right, and
slowly sidestepped me.
His perforating glare
did not cease.**

yardage, "Russian Roulette" had crept back into the game of what am I? Taking slack out of the trigger again, I noticed a sapling at the mid-point between us. There, that is the safety point. If he charges me again, there will not be enough distance between us to allow more than two quick shots! I hoped his galloping hormones would not require a self-defense harvest!

Memory recalled briefly a buck

harvested several years earlier that resulted in removing about five inches of an antler tine broken and deposited into the victim's rut swollen neck! I know the strength required to break off antler tine in neck muscle is incredible.

He lunged forward several steps, threw his head up, and vented a ball of vapor. Leaves billowed in front of me. He stopped with the sapling to his right, and just behind his shoulder. We were no longer yards apart, but a matter of a few feet! The ears were still pinned behind his antlers, and the hair above his shoulders bristled. He bobbed his head, then licked his nose again. Rapid deep breaths noisily expanded and contracted with his sides. Adrenaline coursed through my veins. Hammer blows pounded in my ears and chest. Why can't you hear it? I peered through the head net into his dark penetrating eyes. We were at ground zero with a Mexican standoff! I peered down the rifle barrel at almost 200 pounds of unpredictable hormones! What is your next move old timer? Strange, there has been no urge to kill you. It is as if I know you. The other big bucks were on a less personal basis.

Those dark penetrating eyes, you have not blinked! I can see the marks on your antler beams from the veins that fed velvet stage antler growth. Those bumps on your antlers, are they caused by tick bites while in velvet? Is it true you slept with the left side down during the velvet stage, and the weight caused the antler beam's inward curvature? Why is it that one brow tine is longer than another? I can see small pieces of bark embedded in the base of each antler. The bases of your antlers are dark, and the tines are polished so white! That stench; your urine soaked hock glands. You smell awful!

He was truly a magnificent beast! The deep breathing had slowed, and the ears were not as far back. With his head held high, he stared through me. He stamped his right foreleg twice, swung his huge body to the right, and slowly sidestepped me. His perforating glare did not

cease. As his head went behind a white oak, I eased off the trigger, and shifted to the left slightly. Did I move, or was it your imagination? He stepped around the oak, continuing his glare. He shifted, attempting to get my scent from a different angle. The nose licking returned. It was almost comical how far his tongue reached. His flared black nose desperately sought to collect my scent molecules. Each labored breath was audible. His pungent odor was stifling!

As he sidestepped me, I could no longer follow him with the gun barrel. If I move, it may provoke him. I was still downwind from him. He stopped with his eyes riveted upon me. The ears now were slightly in front of the antlers, his shoulders were not as hunched, and the hair had flattened somewhat. My accelerated pulse slowed, and the hammering in the chest and ears had also diminished slightly. The deep breathing continued with his eyes fixed upon me.

He snorted, wheeled right, and pranced up the hill with his big tail held high. He had finally gotten my scent! I shifted my body watching his departure. He had given me the blood rushing thrill of a lifetime. In the partial light, I listened as his footsteps and shrill blowing faded into the darkening woods. The safety was returned. I extracted myself from the old hickory tree's clutches. I slowly straightened my forgotten aching back and legs. The multiple shots of adrenaline had stressed cramped muscles, leaving me weakened. I felt as though I had just stepped off a tight rope!

The actuality and rarity of this privileged chance encounter was overwhelming. The experience seemed to have lasted an hour. Checking my watch, I found the affair had lasted about 15 stress-filled minutes. I knew this bruiser had earned the right to remain in the gene pool. Taking deep breaths of cold air, reality returned. I had been eye-to-eye with a trophy buck! □

Tom Barnett is a freelance outdoor writer who lives in Glen Allen, Virginia.



Soaring High at Caledon Natural Area

by Mark Fike



©Joe McDonald

This Northern Neck jewel is a shining example of how preserving the past has brightened the future for the people and wildlife of this unique place.

Tucked away in the towering hardwoods along the Potomac River, in King George County, is one of the Old Dominion's best-kept secrets. Caledon Natural Area boasts one of the largest summer populations of bald eagles along the eastern seaboard, and has played a big role in preserving the habitat of our national symbol. During June, July, and August visitors can see upwards of 60 mature and immature bald eagles soaring high above the cliffs, and wetlands, along the Potomac River.

Caledon Natural Area is a very quiet and peaceful place that has a lot of history behind it. Originally a plantation, Caledon had its early start in the year 1659, and it was used as the early colonial seat by the Alexander family, who founded what is now the city of Alexandria. At one time, tobacco was the cash crop, much like other farms up and down the East Coast.

In the mid 1800s, William A. Smoot inherited the plantation. William Smoot is known for consolidating Caledon by purchasing acreage to the east and west of the existing property. The property was passed down for several generations until it was in the hands of Lewis E. Smoot. Lewis passed away in 1962.

©Dwight Dyke



Originally built in 1659 as a plantation along the banks of the Potomac River, in King George County, Caledon is now a 2,579-acre natural area. Its most famous inhabitants now are the majestic American bald eagles. Their numbers have soared over the past few years to the delight of visitors that come to admire them.

His wife, Ann Hopewell Smoot donated the property to the Commonwealth in his memory in 1974. Since then, the old plantation has become a wildlife sanctuary.

In the early 1980s the high number of bald eagles residing on the property was noticed and a plan was made to manage the land for the benefit of the eagles and other wildlife. Due to the hard work of many people, there is now a no boating zone in the Potomac near Caledon. Numerous trails were developed throughout the 2,579 acres that make up the Natural Area. Besides opening the park to visitors wishing



to hike, bird-watch, or take photos of wildlife, the trail system limits the access of visitors to less sensitive areas. Boyd's Hole Trail is a very popular place to hike and observe eagles during the fall and winter months. Due to the number of eagles that roost along the shoreline, the trail is closed during the summer months. There are many closed areas within the park to protect the sensitive habitat and limit the disturbance to the eagles.

Caledon Natural Area is also home to a very large white-tailed deer population. For many years deer reproduced without check. Wildlife biologists began noticing that the herd was growing rapidly, and that the ground level vegetation was nearly non-existent, leaving the deer little to eat. A management plan was put into place, which

ed. Hunters must qualify with their muzzleloader prior to the hunt. Qualification is usually held in October. Hunts are scheduled the second week of November on weekdays to avoid conflicts with other activities. Thirty stands are available each morning and evening to those whose names are drawn in the statewide lottery. Any remaining stands are open for qualified standby hunters. Volunteers from the Virginia Deer Hunter's Association help coordinate the hunt and ensure safety is first and foremost in the minds of the hunters. Hunters at Caledon will find that the success rate of seeing and harvesting a deer is excellent.

Caledon Natural Area is also a focal point for education. The annual "March for Parks" event raises funds for environmental education.



©Joe McDonald



©Dwight Dike



would allow for limited controlled hunts. Currently, each fall Caledon offers special muzzle-loading hunts that create excellent hunting opportunities. There are several requirements that must be met to hunt Caledon. The first requirement is that all hunters wishing to participate in the special muzzle-loader hunt possess a hunter education card. Muzzleloader rifles are the only firearms that may be used and only antlerless deer may be harvest-

ed. Hunters must qualify with their muzzleloader prior to the hunt. Qualification is usually held in October. Hunts are scheduled the second week of November on weekdays to avoid conflicts with other activities. Thirty stands are available each morning and evening to those whose names are drawn in the statewide lottery. Any remaining stands are open for qualified standby hunters. Volunteers from the Virginia Deer Hunter's Association help coordinate the hunt and ensure safety is first and foremost in the minds of the hunters. Hunters at Caledon will find that the success rate of seeing and harvesting a deer is excellent.



Caledon Natural Area offers everyone, from children to adults, a chance to learn more about wildlife and wildlife management. A newly remodeled visitor center is full of exhibits, while outside, nature trails wind through a variety of forests and low lying tidal marshes. To the thrill of wildlife watchers birds (upper right), like the great blue heron (Ardea herodias), are a common sight.



ring perch swimming its waters. A live beehive shows young people how honey is made, while other specimens are available for examination. In the center of the room is a preserved bald eagle mount. The mount gives viewers a realistic impression of just how large the raptors are. A hummingbird feeder out-

©Dwight Dyke



side of a large plate glass window draws plenty of attention from photographers and bird watchers. Ruby-throated hummingbirds visit the feeder constantly. As many as eight of the miniature birds may be hovering over the sweet nectar at once. The newly remodeled Visitor Center is unique in that patrons are able to "take a hike" indoors through the various habitats found on Caledon. The carpet is colored to show a trail that branches off to the various habitats where billboards explain the importance of each and how they are managed to benefit wildlife.

The first habitat that patrons will see upon entering the park is the "meadows and edges." Meadows and edges are very important to songbirds and raptors as well as snakes, mice, and other small mammals. Insects thrive in grassy fields making for good feeding areas and nesting areas for birds. The edges provide raptors and other animals cover. The staff at Caledon manages the meadows and edges by prescribed burns and mowing. If the areas were not mowed or burned the grass would be out competed by small trees and eventually a forest would emerge.

Forests are also very important as they give mammals, birds, reptiles, and even some amphibians a place to call home. Forests start out as a

group of small trees, which eventually grow and shade out competitors. The end result is a mature forest of high canopy and open forest floor. Woodpeckers, hawks, and other birds live in such areas, as do squirrels, deer, and snakes. Caledon has extensive hardwood forests made of popular, oak, and hickory trees with a few beech trees hugging the moist, fertile bottoms.

As hikers leave the towering forest at Caledon and emerge from the shadows they will arrive at the last habitat of Caledon Natural Area, the tidal marsh. Tidal marshes are the most productive habitat, with hundreds of insects, both terrestrial and aquatic, and numerous species of plants and animals. Eagles forage on the marsh, herons fish the shoreline while frogs sing their chorus during the evening hours. Bullhead catfish, perch, and carp thrive in the brackish water. The marsh also plays an important role for humans as natural water purification systems. The silt and mud strains out pollutants while also providing for flood and erosion control. Thanks to help from Ducks Unlimited and state and federal agencies a wetlands restoration project was completed in 1998, creating new habitat for waterfowl to winter. At the end of the hike through the woodlands and grasslands visitors will find a new appreciation for the work that goes into

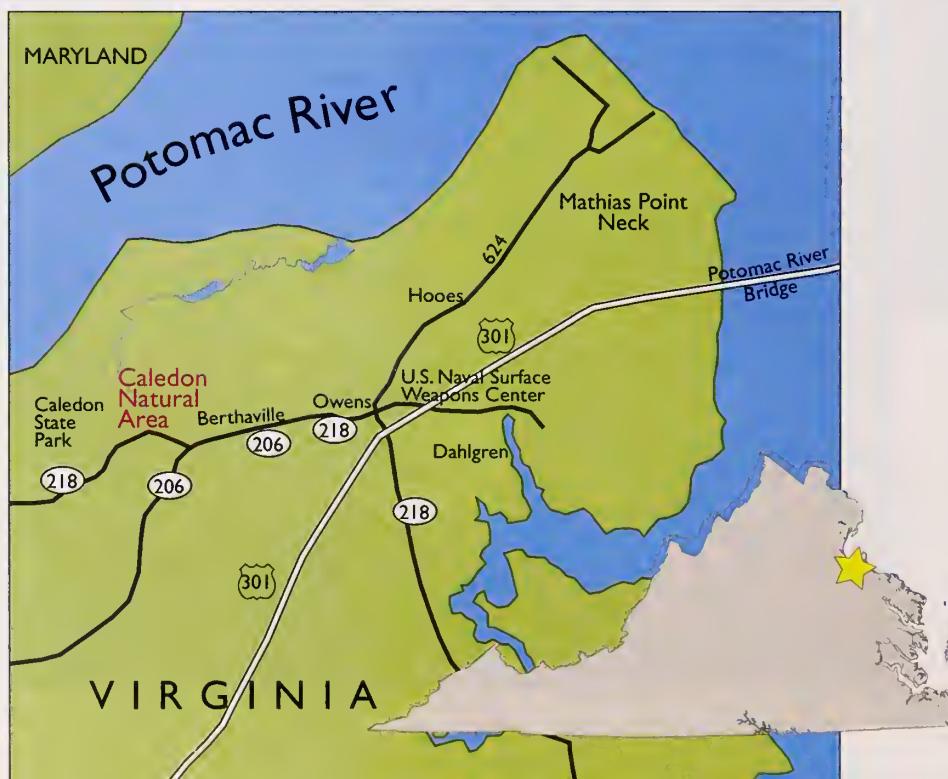


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A great egret (Ardea alba) the largest of the white herons (top), watches carefully for its next meal, while being admired by one of the many visitors to Caledon. Map (left) shows location of Caledon Natural Area. Graphics by Pels.



managing this fragile habitat. The trails are well maintained and new projects to benefit visitors and wildlife are constantly in the works. Caledon is a great family trip as kids and adults learn much about Virginia, its wildlife, and the history of our Commonwealth. There are many reasons to visit. Call 540-663-3861 for upcoming activities. □

Mark Fike grew up in King George County, hunting, trapping, and fishing. He currently is a teacher and an outdoor writer contributing to various publications.

Hunting DOWN Hunger

by David Hart







Scores of Virginians have benefited from the dedication of one man and the generosity of thousands of deer hunters.

David Horne recalls the questions from reporters back in 1991. They wanted to know how much venison Horne thought he could distribute in one season.

"Since this was our first year, I had no idea how much venison we could gather and give to the needy," he says. "I called a food bank in Houston, Texas, which has a similar venison distribution program and asked them how much they distributed in their first year. They told me they did about 7,500 pounds."

Horne, not wanting to be outdone by that little state down south, pulled a number out of his head. "Fifteen thousand," was his reply.

By the end of the 1991 deer season, Horne and a handful of volunteers collected and distributed 33,000 pounds of lean, healthy venison to hungry families and individuals throughout Virginia. Even he was surprised by the generosity of Virginia's hunters and by the processors that offered to reduce their normal fees to help ease the budget restraints associated with butchering, storing and distributing so much meat.

Hunters for the Hungry, the organization that would blossom into one of the nation's leading venison distribution programs, was born.

At the time, David Horne was working for the Society of St. Andrew, a non-denominational food distribution organization that

Hunting has long been a family tradition where ethics and sportsmanship are stressed. Through the generosity of these same hunters, Hunters for the Hungry has grown into one of Virginia's most important non-profit organizations.

helped collect and distribute food to the needy throughout the nation. He and his brother Ken, along with hunting companion Ray Buchanan, were sitting around a table one day when they decided that a venison distribution program similar to the one in Texas would be a good idea for Virginia.

"In July of 1991 we had a meeting that involved members of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, deer hunting organizations, representatives of the Virginia Association of Meat Processors, and area food banks," he says. "It didn't take much to figure out that such a project could be done."

Although Horne's original employer, The Society of St. Andrew, mostly distributed produce, it backed his plan and offered to help fund the project. He lined up eight or ten processors, mostly in the Roanoke Valley. They raised money from private and corporate donors, and embarked on a publicity campaign to spread the word to those he needed the most—hunters. Without



their generosity, there would be no meat to distribute.

"I thought getting the meat was going to be the hardest part," said Horne. "It's not an easy task to get a deer, so I figured most hunters would be reluctant to give up any meat, but that wasn't the case. Virginia's deer hunters were very generous."

The hard part, Horne learned, was getting enough money to pay for the processing and costs associated with distributing the meat. During the first year, the program oper-

ated on a meager sum of about \$20,000.

The second year, the amount of venison donated more than doubled. Deer hunters willingly gave up about 68,000 pounds of meat, either as whole animals or by simply tossing a few steaks, a roast or a few packages of burger into the bin set aside for the needy at their local processor.

Newell-Furniss tends to the administrative end of the program in their rented office space in the Bedford County town of Big Island.

"I couldn't do it without her," said Horne. "Laura is as much a part of this as I am. Our joint efforts have made this program a success."

Surprisingly, all of the meat that is donated stays right here in Virginia. Horne recalled a study that found



The money to process and distribute venison to Virginia's less fortunate citizens, is donated by thousands of individuals, civic groups, organizations, and corporations. It is hoped that more than a quarter of a million pounds of venison will be distributed this hunting season.

no shortage of hunger, often in our own backyards.

"That study found that about one million emergency meals are served every month by shelters in Virginia," said Horne.

Even in Northern Virginia, which has one of the highest per capita incomes in the country, needy families and individuals rely on the generosity of local hunters for a balanced, nutritious meal. It's no secret that venison is high in protein and low in fat, but many who rely on this donated meat have learned that it tastes great, too.

"At first, many of our residents and clients were reluctant to eat venison, just because it's different. People didn't know what to expect. Now it is very popular and we often

have people who come in and ask for it specifically," said Gail Cline, Executive Director of Serve, Inc., a Manassas-based outreach program.

She added that the venison donated by hunters and distributed by Hunters for the Hungry is a precious commodity. Grocery stores, which willingly donate tons of food, are often reluctant to part with fresh meat that is still suitable for sale.

said Horne. "Our biggest obstacle is simply raising the funds to defray the costs."

Thousands of individuals have come forward and donated money, and countless corporations, churches and civic groups including dozens of Ruritan Clubs throughout the state, have also contributed large amounts of money. Perhaps the most notable donation came last

corporate donors, but Horne said the individuals and civic groups play a major role in keeping this program up and running.

There's no telling what the future holds for Hunters for the Hungry, but more than likely, it's a bright one. As long as there are hungry families in Virginia, and generous hunters, this program will be hunting down hunger. □



©Bill Lea

"We are thrilled to get venison," said Cline. "It's one meat product we can count on getting on a regular basis. We use it all the time."

Since its humble beginnings, Hunters for the Hungry has snowballed into one of Virginia's most important non-profit organizations. Last year, the program gathered and distributed a whopping 156,000 pounds of venison. Still, Horne sees no reason why that number can't shoot up to 250,000 pounds.

"I know Virginia's hunters are willing to give that much meat,"

year, when Hunters for the Hungry ran out of money and stopped accepting donated deer.

"We just couldn't take any more because we had no money to pay for the processing costs," said Horne.

Then, Phillip Morris, which already donated \$15,000 earlier in the year, kicked in another \$27,000, which covered the cost of processing 900 deer. Hunters for the Hungry was back in business.

Richmond-based Dibert Valve and Fitting, along with the Mars Foundation, are two of the largest

For more information, or to make a donation, contact Hunters for the Hungry at: (800) 352-4868, or write them at: P.O. Box 304, Big Island, VA 24526. You can reach them via the Internet at: www.h4hun gry.org. Hunters for the Hungry also sells hats, t-shirts, a cookbook, and a handsome print of a whitetail buck and doe.

David Hart is a freelance outdoor writer from Northern Virginia.



Strip



An angler's guide to fishing for this silver-sided treasure in Virginia.

by Gerald Almy

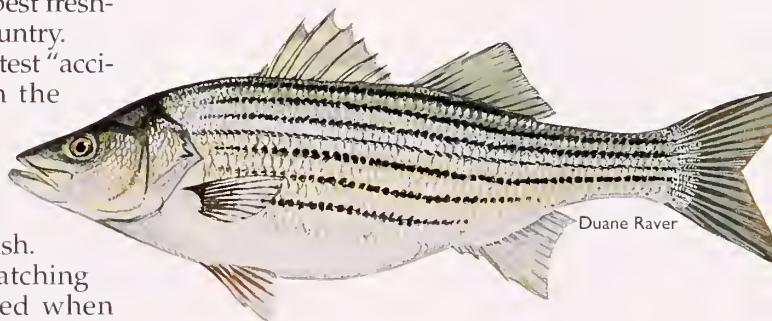
Few gamefish provide as much excitement for Virginia anglers as a sleek striped bass. While Virginia has exceptional saltwater striped bass fishing in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidewater tributaries, the state also offers some of the best freshwater striped bass fishing in the country.

Stripers are one of the greatest "accidents" ever to happen on the freshwater angling scene. Up until the 1940s, these fish, commonly called "rockfish," were considered a great saltwater gamefish. No one ever dreamed of catching them in lakes. That changed when gates were shut on dams forming Santee-Cooper in South Carolina in 1941. The anadromous fish were trapped in a totally landlocked environment. To the surprise of biologists and anglers alike, they survived, reproduced, and thrived in their new setting. A similar event took place in Virginia in the 1950s when Kerr (Buggs Island Lake) Reservoir was built. It is believed saltwater fish trapped in the lake spawned upstream in the Roanoke and Dan rivers.

Soon biologists in other states began

to wonder if stripers could provide a recreational fishery for their anglers and the bass were transplanted to other regions. With a naturally-reproducing population in Kerr, Virginia started a hatchery at Brookneal and soon became a major producer of striped bass fry, spawning over 20 million a year.

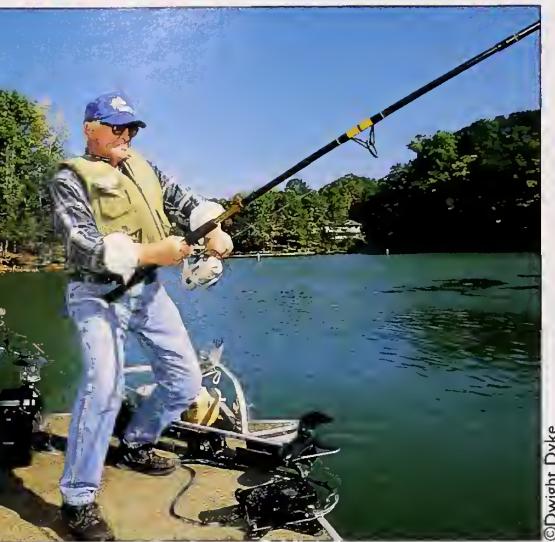
Though they are found mostly in larger lakes, no part of the state lies more than an hour or two from a quality striped bass fishery. Since they primarily inhabit open waters, it can be challenging on light to medium-weight tackle. Stripers can also be caught year-round by adapting your technique to the depths and locations they're found at during different times of year. If these weren't enough attractions, stripers are also delicious when baked, broiled, fried or made into chowder.



Identification

A member of the temperate bass family, the striped bass's Latin name is *Morone saxatilis*. It's sleeker and more streamlined in appearance than its close relative, the white bass, and grows to much heavier weights. The back ranges from dark olive-green to blue-gray or almost black. The flanks and belly are a creamy white with seven to eight dark stripes along the flanks.

Bass Fishing in Virginia



©Dwight Dyke

Average weight of a striped bass caught in Virginia varies from lake to lake, but 5-12 pounds is fairly typical. On April 10, 1999, Robert Burgess, of Stokesdale, North Carolina, caught the current state record. His fish weighed 49 pounds, 4 ounces and measured 46.25 inches in length.

Life History

Female striped bass can spawn when they are 4-6 years old while males mature at 2-3 years. A young female might produce 70,000 eggs while a fish 10 years old may lay several million.

Spawning takes place in rivers the fish ascend in spring, when water temperatures rise to 55-65 degrees F. Several males and a female thrash in shallows and rocky areas as eggs are expelled and fertilized. The semi-buoyant eggs must float for an extended period of time as they drift downstream for two to three days, depending on the water

Outdoor groups, like the Smith Mountain Striper Club (top and right), take their fishing seriously. So much so, they have volunteered countless hours working with fisheries biologists from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to help assure this prized game fish flourishes in the inland waters of Virginia. They invite anglers to learn more about fishing for striped bass by visiting their web site at www.striperclub.com or by calling (540) 297-2307.

temperature. Kerr Reservoir provides the precise conditions required for successful striped bass spawning, making it one of only a few lakes in the country with a naturally-reproducing landlocked population.

The world for these newborn striped bass is a perilous one, but those that survive will grow to a foot or more in length and weigh about 1.5 ounces by their second year. They'll reach 18-24 inches by the fourth year and weigh 3-5 pounds. A 20 pound fish will take around three feet long and is likely 10 years old. Length growth decreases sharply at this point and a 30 pounder might only be two inches longer at 38 inches. A 40 pound striped bass measures about 40-42 inches and is likely more than 14 years old.

Habits and Habitat

To understand striped bass behavior and learn to catch them, it's important to understand the ecological background of this fish. For thousands of years, striped bass were strictly ocean and bay inhabitants. By definition, this made them open-water fish and the vastness of their ocean habitat made them roam widely in quest of food, comfortable water temperatures and spawning grounds. In its short half-century as a freshwater gamefish, the striped

has not abandoned the free-roaming, nomadic instinct it developed over countless centuries as a saltwater species.

True, the pinstriped quarry has constricted its free-roaming tendencies to suit the new confines of its lake habitats. It no longer roams hundreds of miles, but does still travel dozens of miles over the course of a year. One study showed striped bass in a large reservoir traveled over 26 miles in a season.

Coupled with this tendency to wander is a strong preference for open water. From a management standpoint, this makes striped bass particularly appealing to fisheries biologists as a fish that complements largemouth bass, but does not compete with them. When vast impoundments were created throughout the country during the mid part of this century, black bass, bluegills, pickerel, and crappies quickly filled the habitat niche around the shoreline near cover such as logs, brushpiles, weedbeds, and docks. But that left large expanses of open water where abundant populations of shad roamed but few predatory gamefish were found. Striped bass filled this vacant slot perfectly, roaming offshore, feeding on baitfish such as shad and herring that were often too large for most bass to consume.

This different nature of the striped



©Dwight Dyke

and the patterns of movement of the fish over the course of a season are important to keep in mind if you've mostly fished for black bass. Stripers might be in one area one day, miles away the next.

Stripers occasionally are found right on the bottom, but more often they suspend at mid-depths. While they don't orient to shoreline cover like a bass does, they do favor certain types of structure during their travels, such as river channel edges, sunken islands, mud flats, flooded roadbeds, dropoffs, bridge pilings, underwater ridges, and dams.

A good topographical map of the lake and a depth finder will help you locate these areas. As you learn the stripers movement patterns you can mark the locations where you find them and time of year on the map or in a fishing journal. Use that information the following year and you'll likely find the fish in the same area.

Research and Management

Virginia has one of the most extensive freshwater striped bass programs in the country. Over 20 million fry can be produced in a typical year at the A. Victor Thomas Striped Bass Hatchery at Brookneal, as well as 600,000-800,000 fingerlings. Some of these are traded to other states and countries, but up to half-a-million fingerlings are planted in state waters, fish that range from 1 1/4 to 3 inches in length.

Many lakes in the state receive stripers, ranging from small waters, such as Waller Mill Reservoir, near Williamsburg, at 360 acres, to sprawling lakes like 20,600-acre Smith Mountain. DGIF biologists Michael Duval and Dean Fowler say two things are crucial for a lake to be considered for the stripers program. First, it must have sufficient cool water during summer. Striped bass prefer water temperatures below

©Dwight Dike

Striped bass fishing at Lake Anna has been excellent over the last few years. David Fauntleroy, of Anna Point Marina in Spotsylvania County, likes the cooler temperatures of fall for landing real lunkers.



80°F. and cannot survive more than a couple weeks of exposure to temperatures above that. Oxygen levels also must be sufficient.

The second requirement is adequate forage. Striped bass do best where an abundant supply of Clupeids (alewife, blueback herring and/or gizzard shad) are present for forage. These species occupy open water habitats and can be utilized by the stripers without them competing with shoreline species, such as largemouths.

In lakes with abundant prime habitat, such as Smith Mountain, more restrictive regulations are used (two fish per day limit) to take advantage of the trophy potential of this lake. In most other lakes critical habitat is less abundant and therefore a more liberal limit is allowed (four per day, over 20 inches). As stripier fishing techniques become more refined and sophisticated, biologists may have to alter management strategies to ensure that the quality of the fishery does not drop.

Biologists use creel surveys and gill net samples to monitor striped bass populations. More recently, the Fisheries Division has been employing sophisticated sonar technology (hydroacoustics) to count striped bass in some of the state's larger lakes. Radio telemetry studies have also been conducted by biologist Rick Eades in Lake Prince and Western Branch. He has been tracking the movements of stripers in the lakes to define critical habitats and also study the effect of newly installed lake aerators on habitat selection during summer months.

Some lakes, such as Philpott and Moomaw, could support stripers but are not stocked because they have quality trout fishing. (Stripers love to eat trout!)

Fishing Techniques

Keeping in mind the seasonal movements of stripers is crucial for success with these transplants from the sea. In the heart of winter, the fish school deep and vertical jigging or live bait fishing are best. In spring,

stripers are found in coves or feeder arms of the lakes and casting with bucktail jigs, lipless crankbaits, or deep-diving minnow plugs works well. Summer is a time for live bait or trolling. In fall fish often break into schools of shad on the surface and casting with jigs, streamer flies or topwater plugs can pay off handsomely. As fall blends into winter, a flurry of fishing near shore and over flats with lures wraps up the season until the fish go deep again.

That's the general framework to keep in mind, but here are specifics on five tactics that work well for Virginia's stripers.

Vertical Jigging—This method is good for winter or summer. Locate bass or bait over likely structure (river channel, flat, bridge pilings,

fall. Trolling puts your lure down deep where most stripers lurk—and it keeps it there. It's a great technique for finding fish or checking out waters that are new to you. Study the topo and troll slowly along contour lines and over likely stripier hangouts, watching for signs of bait or gamefish on the depth finder.

Downriggers are effective, but many anglers use deep-diving plugs to reach productive stripier depths. Lures, such as the Redfin, Mann's Stretch 25 and 30, Storm Big Mac, Hellbender, and Water Dog dive to effective stripier holding ranges of 15-30 feet. These can be used alone or with an 18-30 inch leader tied to the center hook of the front treble of the lure and a white $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce bucktail jig attached to it. The



©Dwight Dyke

In the spring of each year striped bass leave Kerr Reservoir and begin moving up the Roanoke and Dan rivers to spawn. Anglers are reminded that heavy-duty tackle is often needed to land these big fish.

dropoff, point, submerged island) then lower a $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 ounce slab spoon, such as a Hopkins, down to the level of the fish or slightly above them. Raise the lure crisply 12-36 inches, then lower it just fast enough that it falls freely but no excessive slack forms in the line. If no strikes come in 15 minutes, move to another spot. Most takes will come on the drop as the spoon flutters down like a wounded shad.

Trolling—This tactic works at any time of year, but is especially good from late spring through early

plug takes the rig deep, but the fish often hone in on the smaller jig when they strike.

Casting Lures—A plain white bucktail jig with a feather along the flanks is one of the most deadly stripier lures ever devised. Simply cast out and retrieve smoothly in likely stripier areas, allowing the lure to drop 3-20 seconds before reeling,

depending on how deep the fish are. If strikes are slow in coming try pausing part way back to let the jig suddenly sink deep like a wounded baitfish.

This same cast and slow, steady retrieve technique is also effective with lures such as lipless crankbaits, big-lipped thin minnow plugs, and shallow divers such as the Rapala, Redfin, Thunderstick and Rebel in chrome with a black or blue back.

Bait Fishing—In the heart of winter or the doldrums of summer, bait is great. Cut bait is used in some areas, but Virginia anglers usually opt for shad, herring or large shiners. Pierce them through the lips or the very outer edge of the back on a size 2-2/0 hook. Sometimes you can get by with just a few split shot



crimped on the line. Other times it's best to rig a leader of 24-48 inches with a barrel swivel and an egg sinker of 1/2-1 ounce on the main line above that. With the split-shot rig you can cast and retrieve a lip-hooked shiner in likely stripers areas. With the egg sinker and shad, it's best to set the lines out immediately below the boat and wait for fish to bite. Good rod holders come in handy for this.

Fly Fishing—Though few anglers try it, stripers can be caught on streamers, such as the Lefty's De-

ceiver, Clouser Minnow, Sims snake, and Whistler, using an 8-10 weight fly rod. At times they'll also strike elongated poppers on top, particularly when they're busting into shad. Chartreuse and white are the best colors. Use a 5-8 foot leader and either a floating or fast sinking tip line, depending on how deep the fish are.

Species Distribution

Kerr Reservoir—Straddling the border with North Carolina, 48,900-acre, Kerr (Buggs Island) is the state's largest stripers destination. With a naturally-reproducing population, stripers are abundant in Kerr and can be caught year-round by trolling or fishing with live bait. In April and May the fish spawn in the Roanoke and Dan rivers where they offer excellent sport for anglers using thin-minnow plugs, bucktail jigs, and live shiners.

Smith Mountain Lake—Many consider Smith Mountain the Old Dominion's premier stripers spot. The 20,600-acre lake consistently produces over one hundred citation-sized fish a year for anglers. Casting bucktails is a favorite tactic in spring. Trolling is effective in summer; in winter vertical jigging pays off. In recent years fishing with live shad has been the hottest method on this deep, clearwater lake east of Roanoke.

Gaston—Immediately downstream from Kerr on the Roanoke River lies 20,300-acre Gaston. Thanks to the buffering effect of Kerr, Gaston stays clearer than its upstream counterpart and provides excellent stripers action. Fish topping 30 pounds have been caught. Try vertical jigging, trolling and fishing with live shiners and shad.

Anna—At 9,600 acres, this lake is a favorite destination for northern and central Virginia anglers. And it seems to be getting better every year. Fish up to 20 pounds are caught, with the average 5-12 pounds. Live bait fishing, trolling, and casting all produce and the fish are caught year-round.

Leesville—A sleeper, this 3,400 acre lake lies immediately downstream from Smith Mountain and sees dramatic water fluctuations over the course of a week from the operation of the Smith Mountain Dam. But if you learn to cope with those level changes, there are some huge stripers here—fish in the 20-30 pound class—that take jigs, live bait, and trolled plugs with trailers.

Tidewater lakes—Several of the tidewater lakes in southeastern Virginia produce quality stripers fishing, including Prince, Western Branch, Meade, and others. Casting bucktails and topwater lures, as well as live bait fishing, is productive in these lakes. Western Branch is particularly productive, yielding stripers up to 41 pounds.

Little Creek Reservoir—Located near Toano, west of Williamsburg, this lake was first stocked in 1993 and is coming on like gangbusters. Even though it's only 996 acres, the lake is deep (60 feet) and has an excellent population of gizzard shad and blueback herring as forage.

Claytor—Impounded in 1939 on the New River, this lake is a fine southwestern Virginia stripers spot. With 21 miles of shoreline and 4,475 acres, the lake sees lots of 8-14 pound fish caught, with some running up to 20 pounds. White bass/stripers hybrids were also introduced in 1992 and are doing very well.

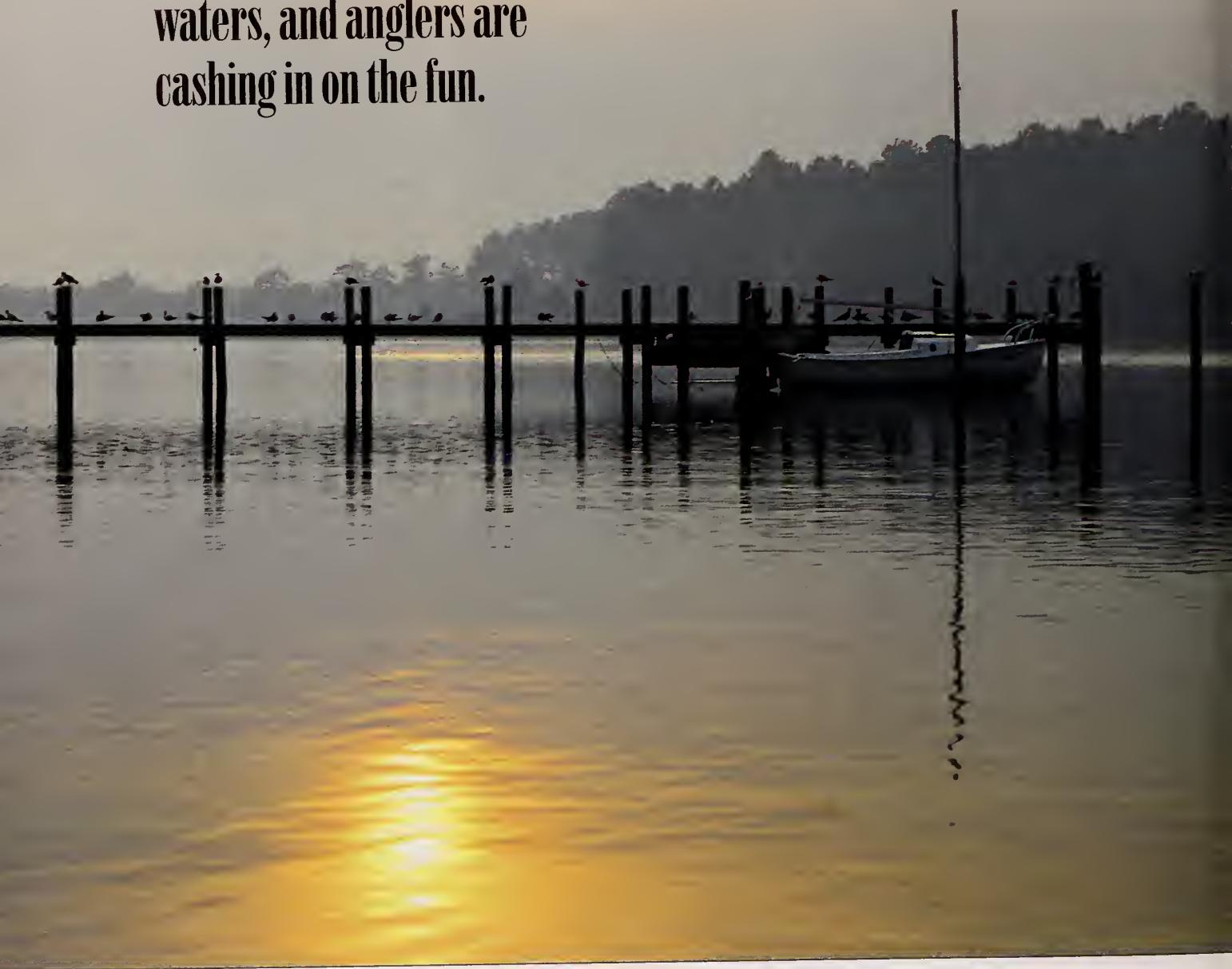
Responsible Angling

When stripers were first becoming popular among freshwater anglers a few decades back, simply catching one of these intriguing gamefish was a challenge. As the numbers and sizes of fish have increased and angling techniques have been refined, it's important to keep track of how many fish you really need to keep so that none are wasted. □

Gerald Almy is a full-time outdoor writer from Virginia and is a field editor for Sports Afield magazine.

Tidal River Stri

This valuable game fish
is making a big comeback
along Virginia's coastal
waters, and anglers are
cashing in on the fun.



by King Montgomery

Virginia's striped bass, *Morone saxatilis*, are available in two models: those fish stocked in lakes and reservoirs to provide quality angling, and wild fish that live in or visit our tidal rivers. The Old Dominion provides some fine fishing opportunities, from the James River in the south to the Potomac River, bordering with Maryland in the north. The tidal stripers that cruise these brackish and fresh waters tend to be stronger and more colorful than their cousins locked behind dams; I think they are a little more difficult to catch as well.

Natural History

Striped bass have evolved to tolerate water with varying degrees of salinity, ranging from the brackish

beginning life in freshwater in the upper reaches of tidal rivers and migrating north or southward along the salty Atlantic seaboard. Found from Florida to Maine, stripers can be caught by anglers in all their environments, but are perhaps the most challenging and fun to pursue while they are in the tidal rivers.

Striped bass spawn in the fresh waters of tidal rivers when the water temperature reaches the mid-60°F. For our stripers, this generally means they spawn as early as April and as late as June, depending on the weather. Stripers don't feed much during the reproduction period, but often hit lures or flies anyway, probably out of instinct or the fish equivalent of irritation. During the immediate pre-spawn, however, first the males and then the larger fe-



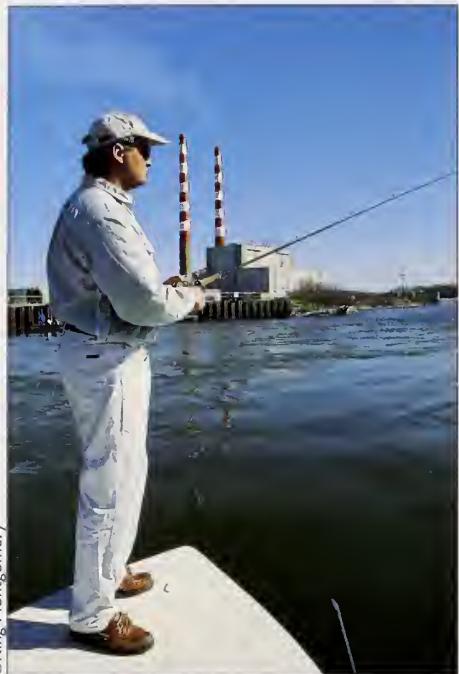
waters of the Chesapeake Bay to the salt water of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This adaptable species moves freely between salinity levels,

Tidal river stripers can be caught on fly, spinning, or baitcasting tackle all year long. But when it comes to catching big fish, and lots of them, anglers know it's hard to top the months of November and December along the Chesapeake Bay.

males arrive near spawning grounds, and actively feed in preparation for the rigors of procreation.

Fish feed in schools near prospective spawning sites on the main river and at the mouths of creeks where the tide pulls with full force. In some rivers, such as the tidal Potomac, shallow flats of this type frequently support the growth of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), a

favorite habitat of stripers. The fish spawn in schools near the surface, and I have seen the masses of eggs and milt cloud the water like milk. The buoyant eggs quickly wash away in the current, where they drift for about three days before hatching and, after another week or 10 days,



©King Montgomery

The warmwater discharges at power plants, such as this one (top) on the tidal Potomac River near the Route 301 Bridge, and the power plant in Alexandria (bottom right), attract and hold striped bass during the late fall and winter months.

become free swimming larvae and begin to feed.

After spawning, stripers move out of the shallows to deeper water to rest and eventually feed. Some move downstream deeper into the salt wedge, some range in the more brackish parts of the river, and still others move into the Chesapeake Bay. These voracious feeders eat practically anything, including smaller fishes of all species, crabs, and shrimps. Many younger stripers, those under two to four years of age, remain in the freshwater reaches of tidal river all year tempting anglers and testing their skill. Light tackle is particularly sporting for these schools of young fish.

Striped bass are most active on

early morning tides just before sunrise, in the evening around sunset, and during the night. Stripers tend to shun bright days and slack water. Cloudy, overcast days are almost as good as night; I have enjoyed some great foggy days fishing on tidal rivers. So don't let a damp, drizzly day keep you away from the water; stripers like it like that.

The Fall Feed

As the days become shorter and the water temperatures begin to drop, stripers awaken from a relative summer torpor and begin feeding and moving, two activities that make for good fishing. The striped bass follow the baitfish into the shallows where structure provides food and cover to most members of the food chain. Rocky points, oyster bars, and flats near deeper water and around fields of SAV are great fishing spots. Stripers also hang out near banks covered with rock riprap, piers where bait hide in the pilings, and bridge pilings with deeper water nearby.

As fall becomes winter, the stripper's metabolism slows a bit, and, once the water is really cold, you'll have to wait until the next

early spring or concentrate your stripers fishing in the warmwater outflow at power plants.

Power Plant Stripers

The process of generating electricity requires a large amount of water, which is pumped in from rivers, lakes, or oceans. It is used in the generation cycle, and then returned to the initial water source. This recycled water is up to seven or eight degrees warmer than the source water. The outflow of warm water from the plant helps create a favorable artificial habitat that attracts many members of the aquatic and marine food chains, from the simplest organism upward. Organisms that normally would migrate away from the colder water, or become lethargic or even dormant through a reduction in metabolic rate, remain active through the winter in the outflow ecosystem. As a result, game fish, such as striped bass, are often available there throughout the colder months, as well as at other times of the year. When winter air temperatures reach into the high 40s or the 50s, as they often do in the Commonwealth, it's like fishing in the spring or fall.



©King Montgomery

Tackle and Tactics

Tackle is best matched to the size of the average fish, so light tackle spinning, casting, and fly fishing gear are the best bets for optimum sport. Spinning and casting rods from 6 to 7 feet and reels spooled



King Montgomery

A good selection of artificial lures that mimic baitfish, like Rat-L-Traps, bucktails, and stickbaits along with flies like streamers and poppers, will all catch striped bass. If locating fish becomes difficult try live or cut bait.

with 12 to 20 pound test line are usually adequate to tame stripers, yet provide good light tackle action. Fly anglers use 9 to 10 foot rods capable of casting 8 through 10 weight lines and relatively large flies. Fall stripers are sometimes active on the surface or in the shallows, so a floating or intermediate fly line can be used. Have a spare spool with a full-sinking line if the fish are deeper, and be prepared to use it. Most late fall and winter fly-fishing for power plant stripers require a full-sinking line.

Hardware lures that take striped bass include surface baits, lipped and lipless crankbaits, spoons, and a variety of bucktail and soft plastic jigs. Large flies, usually between 3 and 6 inches long, such as poppers, sliders, and various streamers, including Clouser's deep minnow and Lefty's Deceiver, are all good options. Generally, the colder the water the deeper the fish, so tailor fly or lure presentations accordingly. And remember, the fish are most active during an incoming or an out-

going tide, so plan to be on the water when the tide is moving.

Cast lures or flies to old piers, rocks, rip-rap, pilings, oyster bars, and flats. Try differing depths and types of retrieves until the fish are located. Work baits in and around power plant outflows, particularly on the down current side. Cast to the intake as well as the outflow pipes or channels.

Since their decline in the 1970s and 80s by over-fishing and pollution, free-swimming tidal striped bass have made a marvelous comeback. Thanks to the cooperation between commercial fishermen, anglers, and fisheries biologists the future looks bright. Now we must make sure we don't repeat the ecological errors of the past. We, and the stripers, might not be so lucky next time.

For more information concerning the regulations for striped bass fishing in Virginia, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230, (804) 367-1000 □

A frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife, freelance writer King Montgomery has a degree in fisheries biology. He lives in Annandale, not far from tidal Potomac River stripers.



©Dwight Dyke

Department of Game and Inland Fisheries biologists (above and below), monitor striped bass populations each year along Virginia's tidal rivers, like the Pamunkey. Since their decline in the 1970s, tidal striped bass have made a remarkable comeback.



©Dwight Dyke



Virginia Angler Recognition Program Earns National Award

by Julia Dixon Smith

At the August meeting of the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries, the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame presented the Department with their prestigious annual Government Entity Award. This national honor recognizes outstanding service to anglers. State natural resources agencies and federal wildlife agencies are eligible to enter. The Department's entry, the Virginia Angler Recognition Program, bested 47 submissions from across the country.

The Virginia Angler Recognition Program was implemented in 1995 as an improved version of the previous Fish Citation Awards Program. With expanded award categories and upgraded award materials, the Department recognizes the fishing accomplishments of anglers from across the Commonwealth. Award categories include Trophy Fish, Angler of the Month, Angler of the Year, State Record Fish, Expert Angler, Master Angler, and Special Events. Currently under consideration is a Fishing Frontiers Award for youth. "We are very proud of our angling community and are quite pleased to offer a program that reflects their notable achievements," said Bill Woodfin, Department Director.

In presenting the award, National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame representative, Gil Radonski, described the Virginia Angler Recognition Program as, "the best we saw to promote the sport of fishing and to enhance youth activities."

The Virginia Angler Recognition Program is administered as a part of the Department's Aquatic Resource Education Program, and additional information is available on the Department's web site at [www.dgf.state.va.us](http://www.dgif.state.va.us) or by calling 804-367-8916. □



Gil Radonski (holding plaque), with the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame presents the Government Entity Award to (left to right) Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Board Chairman Carson Quarles; VDGIF Director Bill Woodfin; Aquatic Resource Education Coordinator Anne Skalski-Windle; Virginia Angler Recognition Program Coordinator Marie Molnar; and Fisheries Division Chief Gary Martel.

The Old Dominion Fly Fishing Show

Join Bernard "Lefty" Kreh, Ed Jaworowski, C. Boyd Pfeiffer, Harry Murray, King Montgomery, and other fly angling personalities at the second annual Old Dominion Fly Fishing Show on December 4 and 5. The show will again be at the Annandale Campus of the Northern Virginia Community College on Route 236, Little River Turnpike.

A resounding success in its maid-

en year of 1998, this year's show is bigger and better. Lefty Kreh and Ed Jaworowski will do casting demonstrations and present slide seminars on various aspects of fly fishing. C. Boyd Pfeiffer will conduct slide seminars and demonstrate his innovative fly tying techniques. Harry Murray and King Montgomery, both frequent contributors to *Virginia Wildlife* magazine, will do slide shows on fly fishing in Virginia and in other Mid-Atlantic locations.

Exhibitors include tackle manufacturers, fly shops, guides and outfitters, and outdoor artists. Trout Unlimited, the Federation of Fly Fishers, and other service and conservation organizations will have booths and provide information on their groups. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' booth will hand out information on fishing in Virginia, and you can buy your 2000 fishing license as well. This is a great time to do some Christmas shopping for the fly angler in your life.

The show is open on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call (703) 793-1159 or e-mail fishutopia@aol.com. □

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NOVEMBER AFIELD

by Jack Randolph

The only problem with November is there isn't enough of them in the year. By rights, November ought to be a hunter's month. It is the deer hunters' month, starting out with archery, then black powder and then what is known as the "General Firearms Deer Season." Nowadays, with archery season open throughout October, followed by the black powder season the old "regular" deer season is almost anti-climatic. But traditions run deep and the great club hunts, with packs of hounds, has a flavor all its own and its followers are as dedicated to their mode of deer hunting as other hunters are to theirs.

Warm autumns have not helped deer hunting much. Most hunters like a little sting in the air to keep the dogs moving and to make deer hunting feel like the cool weather sport that it is.

Of course, November belongs to the small game hunters as well. Usually, however, the upland hunters put off most of their rabbit and bird hunting until the deer hunters have quit the field in January. Turkey hunting with dogs is another rite of autumn, but shortened seasons have discouraged some hunters from keeping turkey dogs anymore.

No one wishes for cold weather in November more than waterfowl hunters. They look for cold weather to move the ducks south and to encourage the fishermen to stay home by the fire so they can hunt. The Bass Federation has worked hard to have its members respect the rights of waterfowl hunters during their short seasons and it appears to be having results.

There are many anglers who prefer autumn fishing to any other. I'll never forget a day I spent one November not far below Walkers Dam on the Chickahominy where a Dardevle garnished with pork rind literally tore the bass up. It was one of those rare days when nearly every cast produced a strike.

In freshwater, November is a fine month for bass, pickerel and crap-



©Dwight Duke

pie. It is also an excellent month for landlocked striped bass.

If you are a freshwater stripers fisherman I'd keep an eye on Lake Chesdin if I were you. The Chesdin stripers are just reaching their potential. We can expect some to weigh well over 20 pounds this year. As usual we can look to Smith Mountain Lake for the real heavyweights and Lake Anna and Buggs Island Lake should continue to produce good numbers.

Anglers who specialize in big catfish will catch plenty of big blue cats in the James and Rappahannock rivers this month, but the summer-loving flatheads will have closed shop for the year.

In the tidal rivers striped bass season is open all month. Fishermen will be offering live bait and casting Rat-L-Traps and Silver Buddies as they seek to fill their limits. This is also an excellent time to fill limits of crappie in the tidal creeks as well as in many of the Commonwealth's reservoirs. As usual, Buggs Island, Lake Anna, and Lake Gaston are good bets.

This is a banner month in saltwater, too. In addition to outstanding fishing for stripers throughout the bay and around the Bridge Tunnel, we will find them along the ocean-front from Chincoteague to the North Carolina line. Big chopper bluefish will range from the inshore wrecks to the mouth of the bay and we can expect schools of gray trout to move south under the usual canopy of gannets and gulls.

Most of the piers close early this month, but a few may offer some night fishing to the die-hard anglers who like to fish from the piers for striped bass.

We can hope for a repeat of the outstanding flounder fishing that took place last year from the Bridge Tunnel out to the Chesapeake Light Tower. Last fall anglers found the main body of flounder as they departed the bay and they'll be looking hard for them again this year.

One can't mention saltwater in November without saying something about tautogs. This is a prime month to tangle with the rough-necks in the rocks after you collect your limits of stripers and trout.

To wrap it up, November is a sportsman's month and the odds are good, whatever your persuasion, you'll find something to do. □



Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Get Into The Action This Fall, Part 2

In the October "Photo Tips" column we started a discussion on shutter speeds and how they work. This column continues that discussion.

Making It Sharp

When you've decided to photograph a subject by freezing its action you must first consider how the subject relates to the film surface during the exposure. If the subject is running toward the camera, all it will do is appear bigger the closer it gets to you. A shutter speed of 125th of a second should suffice to stop this action. But, if the same subject were to run past you, it would be a different story. The subject would pass very quickly across the viewfinder (instead of slowly getting larger) and would need a higher shutter speed to stop its passing; 250th of a second or higher.

Another thing to keep in mind is the peak action in a movement. Being able to recognize this split second moment in time will enable you to capture sharp images of a moving subject at slower shutter speeds, which is particularly handy in low light situations. For example, when a bird flaps its wings there is a single moment when the wings are at a standstill in the upward or downward beat. I have shot an osprey landing on a nest at sunset at a 15th of a second at f4.5. It was shot on a tripod with a long lens and it was sharp as a tack because I caught the peak action of

the bird's wings in the upward beat as it landed.

Watch a horse when it gallops along. Can you see that moment when all its legs are gathered beneath it? Or when stretched out full length? That is the peak of action I am talking about!

Here's another thought for you. Did you realize that different parts of your subject can travel at different



I was happy to catch this osprey when its wings hit the "peak of action." This photograph was taken on Fisherman's Island at sunset at a 15th of a second at f4.5. It was shot on Kodachrome 64 film. I used a Canon 500mm lens, a Canon F-1 camera and a sturdy Gitzo tripod with an Arca Swiss mono ball. ©Lynda Richardson.

speeds? The body of a subject may remain fairly stationery while its legs or wings become blurs of activity. You might choose a higher shutter speed than normal to freeze the more active legs or wings or you might focus in on the stable body using a slower shutter speed and letting the legs or wings blur, panning with the subject as it passes.

Panning

Another way to capture movement on film is by panning. Panning is simply following your subject with the camera....even after you've taken the picture. This follow through is just as important as it is when making a golf or tennis swing. By keeping the speed and line of a moving subject one can be sure to capture the best action. Panning can be done using high or low shutter speeds. If you pan using high shutter speeds you will capture your subject frozen in action. If you pan using a slow shutter speed like a 15th of a second or less, you can capture cool, blurry action with a streaked background that appears to emphasize the movement of your subject. (Try for clean, contrasting or colorful backgrounds.) Depending on the movement of the subject's body parts, sometimes panning can produce sharp as a tack heads or bodies of a critter while the remaining appendages are a blur of motion. Neat, eh?

One last thing to throw into your bag of tricks! Think about adding fill-flash to the quotient. If you are shooting in a low light situation sometimes fill-flash will be just enough to stop the action of your subject. If you're having to hand hold a 50mm lens at a 15th of a second because of the low ambient light level, the kick of a fill-flash might be all you need to salvage the situation. Don't be afraid to give it a try! □

by Joan Cone

A Fabulous Venison Stew For Your Holiday Dinner

Dutch ovens, crockpots, and pressure cookers ensure you and your family fabulous stews. The following venison recipe had my family begging for more!

Menu

Curried Pumpkin Soup
Cranberry Venison & Rice
Warm Broccoli Salad
Holiday Orange Cake

Curried Pumpkin Soup

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
 ½ pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
 ½ cup chopped onion
 2 tablespoons flour
 1 tablespoon curry powder
 1 can (14 ½ ounces) vegetable broth
 1 cup water
 1 can (16 ounces) pumpkin
 1 tablespoon honey
 ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
 Freshly ground pepper to taste
 1 cup evaporated skim milk

Heat the oil in a heavy saucepan. Sauté the mushrooms and onions until the onions are softened. Add the flour, curry powder and cook, stirring constantly, 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and, stirring constantly, add the vegetable broth and water. Stir in pumpkin, honey, nutmeg and pepper. Simmer 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the evaporated skim milk near serving time and heat through; do not boil. Serves 6 to 7.

*Cranberry Venison & Rice

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
 2 pounds venison top round,
 cut into 1-inch cubes, divided
 3 medium onions, each cut into
 8 wedges
 2 cups beef or venison stock
 1 cup dry red wine
 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
 1 teaspoon salt
 ½ teaspoon pepper
 1 package (12 ounces) fresh
 cranberries

½ cup packed brown sugar
 ½ cup flour
 ½ cup water
 8 cups hot cooked white rice
 Snipped fresh parsley (optional)

In a 6-quart Dutch oven, heat 1 tablespoon oil over medium-high heat. Add half of venison cubes. Cook for 4 to 6 minutes or until meat is no longer pink, stirring frequently. Using slotted spoon, remove meat from pot. Set aside. Drain pot. Repeat with remaining oil and venison. Return meat to pot. Stir in onions, stock, wine, vinegar, garlic, thyme, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low. Cover. Simmer for 1 to 1 ½ hours or until meat is tender, stirring occasionally. In medium mixing bowl, combine cranberries, brown sugar, flour, and water. Stir into meat mixture. Cook for 5 to 8 minutes or until sauce is thickened, stirring frequently. Serve mixture over rice. Garnish with parsley. Makes 8 servings.

Warm Broccoli Salad

1½ pounds fresh broccoli
 4 slices bacon
 ½ cup sliced green onions
 ¼ cup balsamic or red wine vinegar
 1 teaspoon sugar
 Salt and freshly ground pepper
 to taste
 1 can (8 ounces) sliced water
 chestnuts, drained
 1 jar (2 ounces) sliced pimiento,
 drained
 1 hard-cooked egg, grated

Trim off large leaves of broccoli and remove lower stalks. Wash thoroughly and break into flowerets. Cook broccoli in boiling water to cover for 1 minute, drain immediately and plunge broccoli into a bowl of ice water. Drain and pat dry with paper towel. Cook bacon in a large skillet until crisp. Remove bacon, reserving 2 tablespoons drippings in skillet. Crumble bacon and set aside. Add green onions and next 5 ingredients to drippings and cook until mixture

boils, stirring constantly. Add broccoli and pimiento to skillet and cook just until broccoli is hot, stirring constantly. Spoon mixture into serving bowl and sprinkle with bacon and egg. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Holiday Orange Cake

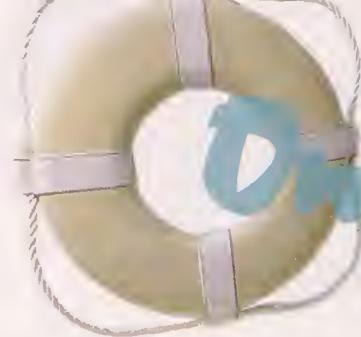
Cake
 1 orange
 1 cup raisins
 ½ cup walnuts
 2 cups flour
 1 cup sugar
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 cup milk
 ½ cup margarine or butter,
 softened or shortening
 2 eggs

Topping

Reserved ½ cup orange juice
 ½ cup sugar
 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 ¼ cup finely chopped walnuts

Heat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour 13 x 9-inch pan. Squeeze orange, reserving ½ cup juice for topping; remove seeds. In blender container or food processor bowl with metal blade, grind together orange peel and pulp, raisins and ½ cup walnuts; set aside. In large bowl, combine flour and remaining cake ingredients at low speed until moistened; beat 3 minutes at medium speed. Stir in orange-raisin mixture and pour batter into prepared pan. Bake in preheated oven for 35 to 45 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Drizzle reserved ½ cup orange juice over warm cake in pan. In small bowl, combine ½ cup sugar, cinnamon and ¼ cup walnuts. Mix well and sprinkle over cake. Cool completely. Makes 12-16 servings. □

*This recipe is from *Venison Cookery*, published by Cowles Creative Publishing, Inc. 1997.



On The Water

by Jim Crosby, Region 4 Boating Coordinator

Virginia's Boat Population

The USA has more recreational boats per capita than any other country in the world, according to the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA), and Virginia ranks 20th in the nation when measured against registered boats. It's anyone's guess when measured against the total boat population, because Virginia has many more boats than show up on registration rolls.

The USA edges out Canada with a boat for every 16 people while the Canadians come in second with 17 people per boat. The Netherlands ranks third with one boat for every 30 people, followed in fourth place by the United Kingdom with one for

every 39, and in fifth place by France with one for every 66 people. Denmark has one boat for every 80 people, Germany has one for every 186 and Japan has one for every 370.

According to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' figures through July 1, 1999, Virginia has 236,743 boats registered. That would be one boat registered for every 28 people if you use the latest available population figure of 6,791,300. If you estimate the total number of boats registered and unregistered in Virginia, the figures would probably place the state in line with the national figure of 16 people per boat or even higher.

Michigan is number one in the nation in boat population with nearly a million boats registered. Michigan is followed by California with 894,347 and Florida with 796,662. Minnesota, unexpectedly, fills the fourth place slot with 768,555 boats.

Virginia has had a boat population growth rate over the past five years of nearly 10 percent. Fortunately, fatalities have not grown at the same rate indicating some positive results from its boating safety education programs. If you own, or plan to buy a boat, also plan to take a boating safety education course, as well, because those who do don't become just another boating accident statistic. □



©Dwight Dyke



Naturally Wild

story and illustration by Spike Knuth

Kinglets

Aside from the ruby-throated hummingbird, the kinglets are the smallest of our birds, measuring only $3\frac{1}{4}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. There are two species—the ruby-crowned (*Regulus satrapa*) and the golden-crowned (*Regulus calendula*). Their colorful crowns plus their genus name, "Regulus" or "petty king," resulted in the name kinglet!

Basically they are olive-colored above, grayish with a yellowish or olive wash below. The ruby-crowned male has just a touch of red atop its head and a distinctive eye ring. The golden-crowned male has a crown of yellow with a dash of red, all outlined in black. The female lacks the touch of red in the center of her crown. Both species have whitish wing bars and the habit of flicking their wings.

For such a small bird, the kinglets are noted for their strong voices. The ruby-crown has a two-noted scolding call, much like the wrens. In spring it has a pleasant song described as "zee-zee-zee" to a lower pitched "kew-kew-kew," followed by a series of loud melodic notes. The golden-crowned utters a high-pitched "tsee-tsee-tsee."

The ruby-crowned is more active and tends to stay lower to the ground. During migration, look for both of them in late-September through early December at mid-level in the forest. They favor conifers, but are found in holly, oak, hickory, and other types of trees. They commonly mix with warblers during migration and with chickadees, brown creepers, titmice and nuthatches in the cold months as they wander.

Both breed mainly in conifers in Canada, the Mid-Atlantic and New England states. They are considered

permanent residents in the spruce stands of the Appalachians. The ruby-crowns breed farther north but winter farther south. Both species build a globular, hanging type nest made of mosses, grasses, fine bark, lichens, spider web silk, lined with feathers and animal hair. They lay five to 10 eggs, often in layers. The young are about the size of a bumblebee when hatched. By June they are fledged and feeding with the adults.

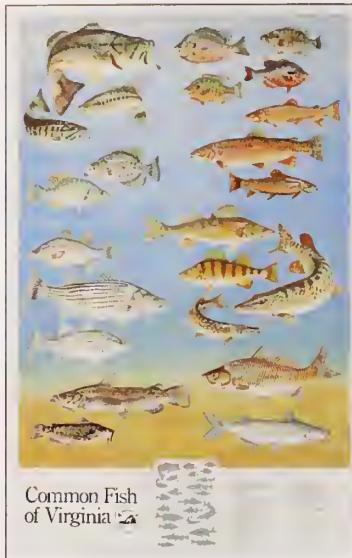
Kinglets feed on small insects including ants, caterpillars, lace bugs, leaf hoppers, plant lice, gnats, spruce bud moths, bark beetles, and scale insects as well as spiders. In winter they eat snow fleas, and tiny berries and seeds. They move carefully around branches inspecting every nook and cranny as they feed. Ruby-crowns tend to feed closer to the ground, although both will occasionally feed off the ground. I've seen them feeding around a large spruce on what appeared to be gnats, by hovering for short periods of time, snatching the insects out of the air.

Neither shows much fear of humans and will come very close. Some writings tell of people actually picking up the little birds and petting them.

Both winter as far south as the Gulf Coast, Mexico and Central America. Many winter in Virginia, especially the golden-crowned. They are very hardy and will winter as far north as the Maritime Provinces of Canada. □



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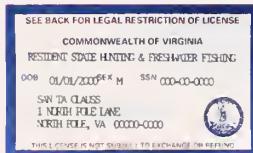


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